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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the Early Elementary Attendance Project was to improve school attendance in the early grades (kindergarten and first grade) in order to develop good attendance habits that would continue through the post elementary grades. A home/school worker approached families of students (N=77) with poor attendance records with a helping attitude. Problems encountered included negative school attitudes, family life style, lack of organizational skills, inadequate nutrition/health care, clothing needs, and employment/child care conflicts. Activities of the home/school worker included home visits, referrals to social service agencies, incentive strategies for rewarding attendance, and material in the school paper about regular attendance. Attendance rates increased 57 percent for project participants. Results support the continuation of the program with earlier intervention in the attendance cycle highly recommended. Efforts directed at increasing classroom teacher awareness and support are also highly recommended. (ABL)

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FINAL REPORT ON FIRST TWO YEARS OF THE EARLY ELEMENTARY ATTENDANCE PROJECT

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SUMMARY

The Early Elementary Attendance Project has been in operation on a limited basis in the Alpena Public Schools for the last two years. Its purpose is to improve the attendance patterns of early elementary students so that they develop good attendance patterns which continue thru the post elementary grades.

Results of this study show that the attendance rates of project participants increased 57 percent. Prior to the first visit of the Home Worker, participants averaged 7.9 days in attendance for each day absent. After intervention the average attendance jumped to 12.4 days present for each day absent. While it is not known how these rates compare to rates for non-participant children at the same schools, the rates are much more in line with the goal of the program.

The data of this study supports the continuation of the program with earlier intervention in the attendance cycle highly recommended. Efforts directed at increasing classroom teacher awareness and support are also highly recommended.

INTRODUCTION

The idea for the Early Elementary Attendance Project grew out of frustration with the impact that court officials and school officials had and continue to have with school attendance habits, for some students, at the junior high school and senior high school level. From preliminary studies conducted by Alpena County Probate Judge Douglas Pugh and by Superintendent of Alpena Public Schools John Taylor, while at the Thunder Bay Junior High Public School, they concluded that truancy for many students at the early elementary becomes truancy habits at the junior high school level. In some cases, students have missed up to 1/3 of thir school by the seventh grade or over 2 years of their school career in grades k-6, education's formative years.

At the same time Marilyn Frank, an elementary principal at lincoln School had grat concerns about the attendance patterns of the children at Lincoln School. When the possibility of a Job Partnership Act grant became available she submitted a grant titled, "Impacting School Attendance." The intent of this grant was to improve school attendance and develop a model for addressing truancy at the elementary school level. The grant was approved and the funds came jointly from the Job Partnership Act and AMA ISD. The funds were used to hire a Home-School Laison person, Anne Hood.

From the first experience with the Early Intervention Attendance Project, it appeared that early intervention with individual children and families will reduce absenteeism and that the children will have a better chance of success in school. If this proves to be true, truancy will diminish in the upper grades - potentially saving substantial amounts of money for the court system, as well as the school system. However, the most important part of this project is the improved education opportunity for youth by being in school every day.

Due to continued success the project was continued with funding provided by The Probate Court, the Intermediate Schools, and Alpena Public Schools with Joan Hauer as the Home-School Laison person. Marilyn Frank was the coordinator of the Project throughout the two years.

Data was gathered by the two Home-School Workers who staffed the project. Data for the 1984-85 year was gathered by Anne Hood while the data for 1985-86 school year was gathered by Joan Hauer. This report is based upon the anaylsis of the data.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The major question of this study is "To what degree did pupil attendance improve as the result of intervention by the Home Worker staff of this project?" One way to answer this question is in terms of the percent of absenteeism prior to and following intervention by the Home Worker. Such an analysis was done and is presented in Table I.

Table I displays the absentee results for the 1984-85 and 1985-86 project years. Reading across the first row beginning at the fifth column, we see that the 19 students reported has a total of 197.5 days absent prior to the first visit of the Home Worker. There were a total of 1676 school days for these students prior to the first visit. Thus, these students were absent 11.8 percent of the total time available to be absent. After the first contact by the Home Worker, we see that these same 19 students were absent a total of 104.5 days of the 1674 days available to be absent. This resulted in an absentee percentage of 6.2 In the 1985-86 school year, the absentee rate for k-1 before the intervention was 13.3 percent and after intervention was 9.2 percent.

TABLE 1

Days Absent as a Percent
of Possible Days Absent
Prior to and After Intervention

			PRIOR TO INTERVENTION			AFTER INTERVENTION			
			NUMBER			NUMBER			
GRADES	YEAR	BLDGS	NO.	DAYS ABS.	POSS DAYS	PERCENT ABS.	DAYS ABS.	POSS DAYS	PERCENT ABS.	CONTACTS
K-1	1984-85	BOTH	19	197.5	1676	11.8	104.5	1674	6.2	89
K-1	1985-86	HINKS	8	91	676	13.5	52.5	764	6.9	32
		LINCOLN	26	353	2674	13.2	187.5	2008	9.3	159
		MAPLE R.	1	14	95	14.7	22.5	85	26.5	5
		TOTAL	35	458	3445	13.3	262.5	2857	9.2	196
3-6	1985-86	HINKS	9	111	918	12.1	59.0	700	8.4	30
		LINCOLN	7	115	848	13.6	24.2	342	7.8	28
		MAPLE R.	7	94	862	10.9	46.5	578	8.4	56
		TOTAL	23	320	2628	12.2	129.7	1620	8.0	114
K-6	1985-86	GRAND TOTAL	77	778	6073	12.8	392.2	4477	8.8	399

Similar results are observed for grades 2-6 which were served during the 1985-86 school year. Here the 24 students served were absent 320 days of the 2628 days available to be absent prior to intervention. This resulted in 12.2 percent absenteeism. After intervention (excluding the extreme case), these students were absent 129.7 days of the 1620 days available for school which yielded 8.0 percent absenteeism.

Thus, the results presented in Table 1 show gains at each combination of grades for both years of the program. These gains can be seen more clearly in Table 2.

TABLE 2

RATE OF ATTENDANCE
PER DAY ABSENT

GRADE	YEAR	PRE ATTN RATE	POST ATTN RATE	GAIN ATTN RATE
K-1	84-85	8.5	16.0	88.0%
K-1	85-86	7.5	10.9	45.3%
K-1	COMBINED	7.8	12.4	59.0%
2-6	85-86	8.2	12.5	52.4%
K-6	85-86	7.8	11.4	46.2%
K-6	COMBINED	7.9	12.4	57.0%

Table 2 shows the attendance rate for each group of grades for each year and for both years combined. As Table 2 shows, the rate of improvement ranges from a low of 45.3 percent increase in attendance for the K-1 students in the second year of the program to a high of 88 percent for the K-1 group during the first year of the program. Looking at the last row in Table 2, we see that the attendance rate prior to intervention for all students served in both years was 7.9 days present for each day absent. After intervention, the attendance rate jumped to 12.4 days present for each day absent. Thus, for the entire program, for both years and all students served, there was a 57 percent increase in attendance.

QUESTIONS BY SUPERINTENDENT TAYLOR

In his Memo dated August 28, 1985, John Taylor raised several important questions about the potential of the Attendance Project. His first question was "Is there a significant improvement in the attendance pattern of the student?" In my opinion the answer is definitely yes. Of the 77 students served

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during the two years, 68 (or 87.3 percent) saw their attendance improve after the intervention of the Home Worker. As mentioned above, there was a 57 percent increase in attendance of all students served.

Mr. Taylor's second question concerned whether gains made in the early grades (grades K & 1) will carry over into higher grades. Data available at this time does not permit answering this question. However, in the future, such data should be gathered to answer this question.

A third question was raised by Mr. Taylor. "Will the project show the same improvements in a rural school setting as in the geographically smaller Lincoln school area?" Data for the 1985-86 school year shows that the rate of attendance improvement was 43.9 percent at Hinks and Maple Ridge combined. In these two schools, children had a pre-service attendance rate of 8.2 days present for each day absent. After intervention, they had a rate of 11.8 days present for each day absent. At Lincoln, the pre-service attendance rate was 7.5 days present for each day absent while after intervention the rate was 9.8. This is a 30.7 percent increase in their rate of attendance. Thus, the improvement in the two rural schools was greater than at Lincoln school.

In his fourth question Mr. Taylor wondered how long a family needed the attention of the Home Worker before attendance gains could be sustained. The data available in this report is not sufficient to answer this question.

Question 5 concerned the ruboff effects on a sibling not being served directly. There were only two cases reported where a sibling's attendance was noted. These were both from the first year of the program. Two cases are insufficient to answer this question. (The two cases observed were mixed with one child improving and the other having greater attendance problems.)

OBSERVATIONS

Several things should be noted. First, both Anne Hood and Joan Hauer kept excellent records which enabled this report to be compiled accurately. Second, this writer did not have available current attendance data for students not being served by this program but in the target schools. It might be useful to determine how similar the post intervention attendance rate of project students compares to the attendance rate of other students at the three project schools in the same grades.

Finally, for the 54 students served during the two years, the average number of absences prior to first contact was 12.1 days. Efforts should be made to intervene earlier if possible. As both Home Workers repored, classroom teacher awareness and support is critical to early intervention. Perhaps special

efforts can be made at the beginning of the 1986-87 school year to work on this area. Also, a lower number of absences could be selected to initiate a referral and first contact. Using the data of this study, one could select an absence rate of one day for every ten days of school.